Failure to Deliver: *Watson and the Shark* and the Boston Tea Party

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The hyphen in the term 'Anglo-American' functions as both copula and separator, suggesting that any conception of what an 'Anglo-American' phenomenon might be must derive from division and displacement as well as conjunction. In the eighteenth century, the dynamics of that interstitial hyphen-space had an inevitable geographical dimension. The real space between England and America – thousands of miles of ocean which took weeks to cross – imposed hard limits on knowledge and perception which characterized every aspect of transatlantic communication and exchange.

As David Harvey and others have argued, contemporary globalized space has emerged with the obliteration of distance through techniques of instantaneous communication and information transfer.[1] Such techniques, and the synchronizations they allow, have created modern cartography and global positioning, as well as allowed distant interlocutors to be contacted without delay or apparent physical resistance, giving us a world that seems apprehensible at a glance. A persistent challenge facing scholars of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world is to avoid the retroprojection of this synoptic brand of awareness onto the slower, heavier, and darker field that comprised the period experience of empire and expansion. We must avoid replicating, within historical narratives of Anglo-American exchange, the seemingly frictionless deracinations of contemporary life. For however common it may be to consider early modernity as the dawn of globalization, the fact is that the eighteenth-century Anglo-American world was not a simultaneous and co-present field, but emerged instead from conditions of belatedness and epistemological fragmentation.

This essay will explore the generative role of these limitations in the pictorial awareness of the era by tracing the problem of delivery as it informs John Singleton Copley's 'Anglo-American' paintings of the 1760s and 1770s, particularly his famous modern history painting *Watson and the Shark* of 1778 (see *plate* 2). Copley lived in a world that was governed by the challenges of long-distance transit, and his life in Boston was thoroughly dependent upon the practice and politics of delivery – the slow and complex movement of objects across the ocean and their proper reception and use. I hope to show that Copley's work reveals deep connections between period practices of *physical* delivery and the techniques of *perceptual* delivery that the artist developed as a transatlantic painter.

Copley's aesthetic of delivery shifted drastically between his American portraits and the paintings he produced after relocating to London. His American portraits attempt to imagine a lossless transfer of perceptual experience over distance, but *Watson and the*

Detail from John Singleton Copley, *Mrs John Winthrop*, 1773 (*plate 6*).

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Shark, painted in London after the Revolutionary War had begun, revised and ultimately renounced that hope. Although this change derives partially from developments in Copley's academic training and the shift in genre from portraiture to history painting, it can also be productively illuminated by reading it alongside the historical politics of delivery in the Revolutionary period, and particularly by examining it in terms of the event that most conspicuously announced the period crisis in Anglo-American material relations: the Boston Tea Party. This was not only the most momentous political event of Copley's time in America, and an event in which Copley himself was deeply involved; it was also an event that might be described as the most spectacular 'misdelivery' of the Revolutionary era. There are many compelling connections between the Tea Party and *Watson and the Shark*, and although it does not directly depict the event, *Watson and the Shark* wrestles with the failure of transatlantic communal life and the broader catastrophe in Anglo-American material relations that the Tea Party represented. The painting also imagines the implications of that failure for the function and meaning of art itself.

1 John Singleton Copley, *Mrs Richard Skinner (Dorothy Wendell)*, 1772. Oil on canvas, 101 × 77.5 cm. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Bequest of Mrs Martin Brimmer, 06.2428). Photo: © 2011 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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2 John Singleton Copley, *Watson and the Shark*, 1778. Oil on canvas, 182.1 × 229.7 cm. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art (Ferdinand Lammot Belin Fund). Photo: Courtesy of the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Perceptual Delivery in Copley's American Portraits

How was the art of painting implicated, for Copley, in the drama of long-distance materiality that characterized colonial life in Boston? Copley's most ambitious and accomplished paintings in the years leading up to the Revolution comprise a group that I will call his 'tabletops'. Featuring sitters addressing viewers across highly polished tables (*plates 1* and 3-6), these have come to exemplify his precise American style, which was notable for its divergence from the loose, brushy facture popular in London and practised by the likes of Reynolds and Gainsborough. The shiny tables in these paintings are not without precedent: they derive partly from the frontal ledges or sills that staged illusionistic projection in Renaissance portraiture, and from a variety of projection and threshold devices in Dutch and French genre and still-life painting. But Copley developed these motifs to a level of exactitude, and metapictorial investment not seen before or arguably since. The orthogonal surfaces of the tables occupy and define the implied space between the sitter and the viewer, mediating the exchange of visual information in the paintings. Upon these surfaces, the elbows, palms, forearms, wrists, and fingertips of the sitters – along with the objects they hold – generate precise reflections (reflections that announce the polish and refinement of the tabletops just as the delicate hand gestures announce the polish and refinement of the sitters). Copley takes an obvious delight in the forms that unfold from the meeting of flesh and reflection, such as the striated orb- and

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3 John Singleton Copley, *Mr and Mrs Isaac Winslow (Jemima Debuke)*, 1773. Oil on canvas, 101.6 × 123.82 cm. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (The M. and M. Karolik Collection of Eighteenth-Century American Arts, 39.250). Photo: © 2011 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

diamond-like shapes that develop from the reflected hands in *Mrs Richard Skinner (Dorothy Wendell)* of 1772 (*plate 1*) and *Mr and Mrs Isaac Winslow (Jemima Debuke)* of 1773 (*plate 3*). These half-reflected forms serve to install bursts of spatial complexity within the portraits, producing illusions of multidimensional fullness and projection that partially transcend the two-dimensional limitations of pictorial representation. Thus, although in reality the reflected image of Dorothy Wendell's hand sits along the same two-dimensional canvas plane as does the rest of the portrait (*plate 1*), it helps generate a multidimensional impression by replicating itself along other implied axes. The hand seems to lurk 'below' the surface of the table and also appears to stretch 'forward' toward the viewer along the tabletop. Copley is also careful to show that the reflection adds information that the predominant point of view in the portrait cannot reveal – note that Mrs Skinner's little finger is more dramatically crooked in reflection than can be seen in her foreshortened 'real' hand.

With their precise evocations of specific textures, their intensive observations of detail, their play with optics and reflection, and their overt concern – all hands, eyes, and ears – with sensation, the tabletop paintings have long been loosely connected to the broader Enlightenment discourse of empiricism. Thus far in the scholarship on American art, this empiricism has been interpreted in an almost exclusively nationalist-essentialist mode. Barbara Novak has done the most to cement this association. For Novak, Copley's empiricism ('the need to grasp reality, to ascertain the physical *thereness* of things') was 'a necessary component of the American experience' and was constantly threatened by Copley's dalliance with the imported European painting conventions that would 'master and, in many ways, destroy him after he fled from Boston to Europe'.[2] In other words, Novak defines empiricism as a nativist trait, an essentially American desire to deal in undistorted truths, predicated on the rejection of English and European convention.

Novak's hugely influential treatment of empiricism as a provincial artistic project

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has had two problematic effects on later analysis of Copley's work and indeed on the general tenor of scholarship on American colonial painting. By tying empiricism to American essentialism, her reading effectively foreclosed it as a topic of serious analysis for later scholars more interested in the transnational qualities of Copley's painting. Indeed, compared to scholarship on French and British art in the eighteenth century, which has devoted significant attention to sensationalist philosophy and painting, writing on American and American colonial painting of the same period has remained eerily silent on the topic.[3]

The nativist view of empiricism as a project opposed to 'importation' also obscures the close connection between empiricism and the long-distance transmission of goods and ideas. Empiricism was a project deeply engaged in problems of transmission, in the challenge of maintaining sensory continuity across long horizons of time and space, and was thus in many ways a quintessentially transatlantic or in Copley's case Anglo-American project.[4] Locke, Berkeley, and Hume each puzzled over the problem of distance and particularly over its effect upon the strength of sense impressions. Hume, to give just one example, wrote at length about how and why spatial and temporal removals produce a 'diminution of vivacity' in the perception and/or recollection of 'foreign and remote objects'.[5] In empiricist discourse, removals in time and space could threaten to tear apart the very fabric of subjectivity and society. The continuity and juxtaposition of sense impressions and associations were what maintained the stability of perception and memory – they were, to quote Hume, 'the only links that bind the parts of the universe together'.[6]

How to preserve that universe over the huge intermission that the Atlantic imposed? This was not merely a philosophical problem: because imperial enterprise interjected unprecedented distances and delays ('extensions' and 'durations', in empiricist terms) into communal life, it forced the issue of sensory continuity through space and time to be managed and addressed, especially by those (like Copley) at the peripheries. Copley's tabletop paintings are deeply engaged in these problems of distance and perceptual fragmentation. As I have argued elsewhere, Copley first perfected the tabletop motif for *Boy with a Flying Squirrel (Henry Pelham)* of 1765 (*plate 4*), a painting he dispatched across the Atlantic in order to open an artistic correspondence with painters in faraway London.[7] *Mrs Humphrey Devereux*, another early tabletop, was explicitly commissioned to produce and maintain a sensory and mnemonic connection across the ocean – Copley painted it in Boston to be shipped to London to the sitter's son (*plate 5*).[8] Not all of the tabletops were explicitly transatlantic in this sense, but they all share an essential structure of perceptual delivery across the tabletop plane from background to foreground, thematizing sensory connection and communication across space and time. All of Copley's tabletops are, in this sense, long-distance paintings. Overall, they are strenuously hopeful essays in the capacity of painting to deliver transitive form and thereby to hold 'the parts of the universe together'.

4 John Singleton Copley, *A Boy with a Flying Squirrel (Henry Pelham)*, 1765. Oil on canvas, 77.15 × 63.82 cm. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Gift of the Artist's Great-Granddaughter, 1978.297). Photo: © 2011 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

How does Copley imbue his tabletops with these connective powers? His strategies closely parallel empiricist models of memory and perceptual cohesion.

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First, the tabletops offer a surface for performing and encouraging a synthetic, multisensory mode of reception that had a long empiricist pedigree. George Berkeley, perhaps the most important theoretician of vision in the eighteenth century and a figure closely tied to Copley and Boston in the mid-eighteenth century, argued in his essays on vision that the outside world arrives at the threshold of consciousness as a disassembled set of heterogeneous sensory impressions that must be synthesized by the perceiver. He noted, for example, that distance or depth cannot be perceived on a purely visual basis but rather requires the synthesis of visual and tactile perception.[9] For Berkeley, vision provided only a flat pattern of colour and light: 'what we immediately and properly see are only lights and colours in sundry situations and shades, and degrees of faintness and clearness, confusion and distinctness.'[10] In order to perceive depth and distance, one must learn to coordinate these planar 'lights and colours' in the mind with the three-dimensional information gained by exploring the world tactilely. Berkeley called this a process of 'incorporation', since the fullness of the world did not exist in reality and could only be produced in the act of its proper ingestion and assembly by the body and mind.

As two-dimensional illusions, Copley's paintings cannot escape their own status as mere 'lights and colours' on a flat plane. But, as if attempting to overcome this limitation, they go out of their way to encourage the viewer to synthesize the optical information on offer with memories of tactile experience, and thereby to produce a fully incorporated reception of the painting. Recall that Copley populates his polished tabletops not just with reflections but specifically with reflections of hands. The hands blossom into reflection on the tabletops, where, joined to their optical doubles, they not only suggest a multidimensional geometry as discussed above, but also model the fissure and fusion of optical and tactile sensation. As the image of the sitter travels 'forward' across the table to the viewer, the viewer must make sense of the strange half-reflected forms there, which requires that optical phenomena and haptic memory be considered simultaneously. The two sides of the optical/tactile divide are acknowledged but also healed in reflection and urge a similarly plenary reception on the part of the viewer.

5 John Singleton Copley, *Mrs Humphrey Devereux*, 1771. Oil on canvas, 102 × 81 cm. Wellington, New Zealand: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Gift of the Greenwood Family, 1965 (1965-0013-1)). Photo: Courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Given Copley's position in Boston, these synthetic operations were not simply dry explorations of theoretical knowledge. The promise tenuously tendered by Berkeley's empiricism – the promise that an essentially fragmented world might be successfully incorporated after crossing the horizons of distance and time – had a practical analogue in colonial life that reinforced its relevance for Copley's practice. For it was not just pure sense impressions that Bostonians had to synthesize and incorporate – most of their material links with England had to be similarly processed. In fact the empiricist dynamics in Copley's tabletop paintings, in which objects unfold into synthetic incorporation across thresholds of exchange, closely mirrored the dynamics of transit and reception that characterized material life in colonial Boston.

Every scrap of knowledge that American colonists had about England, every image, every object, every memory, had to be physically transported thousands of

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6 John Singleton Copley, *Mrs John Winthrop*, 1773. Oil on canvas, 90.2 × 73 cm. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Morris K. Jesup Fund, 1931 (31.109)). Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

miles across the water on a ship. But in order to cram English culture onto ships and to assure its preservation through the long journey, that culture generally had to be schematized or abstracted – flattened, desiccated, fragmented, pickled, or pressed. It then had to be reembodied, revivified, and reassembled at the other end upon arrival. In architectural pattern books, for example, the bodies of buildings in England and Europe were reduced to modular diagrams before being resynthesized into habitable buildings in America. Bolts of shipped textiles unfolded and recombined into dimensionally dynamic sewn ensembles on the bodies of colonists. Tea expanded on contact with American water in American teapots, its rehydration prior to a literal sensory incorporation. Seeds unpacked themselves into plants in the body of the colonial earth.[11] In this sense, the perceptual deliveries in Copley's paintings derive from and refer to the material deliveries upon which life in the oceanic interculture of the Anglo-American world was based.

Significantly, the objects on Copley's tabletops are often transatlantic delegates that have (or will have) experienced such transformation. As Paul Staiti has shown, for example, the nectarine branch held by Mrs John Winthrop (*plate 6*) was grown by grafting imported nectarine stock onto American trees.[12] Indeed, this process of grafting is a serviceable analogy for colonial processes of reception generally – portable, partial, fragmented information from a distance must be reattached to local American bodies upon receipt. In the same way, Copley's tabletop sensory synthetics attempt to ensure that the painting itself might be grafted onto the viewer's living sensory matrix.

Certainly the most famous 'table' in all of sensationalist discourse is Locke's *tabula rasa*, in which the act of sensory apprehension is understood as the impression of images on a tabular surface. Copley's tables are implicated in this discourse of impression as well. In empiricist discourse (I shall take Hume as exemplary), the most powerful and immediate impacts caused on the mind ('those which enter with most force and violence') were called 'impressions', of which 'ideas' were 'the faint images in thinking and reasoning'.[13] These ideas, when later recalled from memory and reflected upon, could cause new impressions ('impressions of reflection').[14] The oscillation of a perception from impression to idea and back again could theoretically continue indefinitely; what secured impression's capacity for such iterability was its ability to strike copies of itself in the mind:

> An impression first strikes upon the senses, and makes us perceive heat or cold, thirst or hunger, pleasure or pain of some kind or other. Of this impression there is a copy taken by the mind, which remains after the impression ceases; and this we call an idea. This idea of pleasure or pain, when it returns upon the soul, produces the new impressions of desire and aversion, hope and fear, which may properly be call'd impressions of reflection because deriv'd from it. These are again copy'd by the memory and imagination, and become ideas; which perhaps in their turn give rise to other impressions and ideas.[15]

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7 John Singleton Copley, *Young Lady with a Bird and Dog*, 1767. Oil on canvas, 122 × 101 cm. Toledo, OH: Toledo Museum of Art (Purchased with Funds from the Florence Scott Libbey Bequest in Memory of her Father, Maurice A. Scott, 1950.306). Photo: Photography Incorporated, Toledo.

The efficacy of the preservation, transmission, and refreshment of sensation was thus linked to values of indexicality, precision, and replicability – precisely the operations in play on Copley's tables. Copley's letters indicate that he was familiar with the distinctions between ideas and impressions, their relation to the preservative capacity of memory, and the applicability of all of these notions to painting.[16] It is also crucial to note that Copley's artisanal apprenticeship (such as it was) was in printmaking, where getting a good 'impression' involved peeling away reversed images from a sharply cut engraving on a tablelike bed.[17] Compositionally structured around visual reflection, these paintings embody contemporary tropes of memory and sensory continuity, thematizing their own convertibility between idea and impression and thus their capacity to forge a continuity of consciousness between artist and viewer. Copley advertises the paintings' own fixative capacities: they leave reflections, copy themselves on the mind, and switch easily between idea and impression.

Copley's tabletops, then, function to overcome gaps in communal perception by triggering their own synthetic incorporation in the viewer and by asserting their own capacity for the production and perpetuation of impressions. There is one other way in which these paintings also attempt to ensure their own efficient, embodied delivery. Virtually every contemporary art theorist in eighteenth-century Europe called for instantaneity and unity within paintings so as to avoid the interruption or deflection of the viewer's attention and therefore the kind of 'diminution of vivacity' that Hume and others described. As Reynolds put it, the painter should avoid 'whatever may in any way serve to divide the attention of the spectator'.[18]

For many theorists, the most problematic dissipations in painting were those that drew too much attention from the upper half of the canvas to the lower half. Copley got a direct lesson about this in 1767, when his painting *Young Lady with a Bird and Dog* (*plate 7*) was criticized in London because the 'under parts' of the painting – the dog, carpet, etc. – were 'too brilliant and highly finished in proportion to the Head and Hands'. The London critics preferred his earlier *Boy with a Flying Squirrel* (see *plate 4*) because he had 'made the under parts of the picture more subordinate'.[19] Copley absorbed this advice so well that he was careful to pass it along to his half-brother Henry Pelham, sitter for *Boy with a Flying Squirrel* and himself an aspiring painter, later on. In a letter to Pelham from London, in which he suggests that Pelham might 'try somthing for an Exhibition', he admonishes him to 'be carefull as you go towards the bottum of your Canvis to mannage your objects that they do not take the eye.'[20]

Given these concerns, it becomes evident that another benefit of the tabletop motif for Copley was that it allowed him to subordinate what we might call the nether regions of the painting while still insisting on an overall consistency of sharpness and finish. The tabletops cast the bottom half of the painting (along with the 'under parts' of the sitter) into shadow or obliterate it from view altogether, fixing and focusing the eye above the painting's internal horizon and assisting in the unitary

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delivery of affect to the viewer. These 'under parts' – and their violent return to Copley's painting – will be addressed in a moment.

Seeing Pictures, Taking Tea

Copley's tabletop paintings, then, strain to become the sort of objects which can ensure lossless communication, fixative impression, and plenary perception, and which might therefore be capable of overcoming the inherent fragmentations of distance and time, linking subjects in communities of embodied conviviality. Given these goals, it is perhaps no accident that the figures in Copley's tabletop paintings all have the air of taking tea even though none of them are actually depicted doing so. The paintings evoke and attempt to embody long-distance sensory incorporation, and the consumption of tea was both the primary practice and the master metaphor for that incorporation in the British Empire at the time. Tea was a global commodity, elaborately processed and packed, shipped thousands of miles, and then synthetically reincorporated not only through actual ingestion but also through the performance of a series of elaborate gestural rituals that redoubled the communal function of consumption. To take tea was to be in intimate conversation not only with one's own immediate compatriots but also with England.

This, at any rate, was the ideal. In reality, of course, Copley was living through the breakdown of such political and material relations. Tea occupied the centre of the politics of consumption leading up to the Revolutionary War, largely due to its overdetermination as an agent of transatlantic colonial embodiment.[21] In the years surrounding the Boston Tea Party – known at the time as the 'Destruction of the Tea' – the mis-incorporation or mis-delivery of tea came to symbolize the collapse of the integrated transatlantic body of the British Empire. The imposition of unfavourable mercantile relations and the resistance to those relations was often represented in contemporary visual culture, for example, as a forcible introjection of tea into hapless bodies (*plate 8*). In the Boston Tea Party itself, in December of 1773, a well-organized group of Sons of Liberty stormed onto three ships docked at Boston Harbour and dumped their cargoes of dutied tea overboard. Here, opposition to British policies was performed through the refusal to 'take' tea properly, that is, through the enforced spoilage of the tea cargo by its premature brewing in the harbour. Indeed, themes of imperfect or interrupted delivery – quarantine, spoilage and wreckage – functioned throughout the entire theatre of revolutionary politics. Questions of failed or refused importation were overtly politicized during the very years that Copley was working so strenuously to develop an aesthetic of perfect perceptual delivery.

Copley left Boston in June 1774, just as the British began barricading Boston Harbour in punishment for the Tea Party. After taking a Grand Tour of Italy and moving permanently to London, he soon began work on *Watson and the Shark*, his first large-scale history painting. The overt subject of the painting (see *plate 2*) is well known: it features a perilous incident in the young life of the British merchant Brook Watson. In 1749, at the age of fourteen, Watson had slipped overboard the merchant ship he was working on to take a quick swim in Havana Harbour. While swimming, he was nearly killed by a shark. The shark attacked twice; first stripping off all of the skin on one leg, then taking much of the leg itself, just below the knee. Watson's comrades, meanwhile, had been frantically rowing out to save him. The painting meets the narrative just at the moment that the rowboat has arrived and the shark comes around for a third (and presumably final) blow, a blow that Watson's fellow crew members would help avert.

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8 Philip Dawe(?), *The Bostonian's paying the excise-man, or tarring & feathering*, 1774. Mezzotint, 35.56 × 24.13 cm. Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. Photo: Courtesy of the Library of Congress (LC-USZC4-14078).

9 Howard G. Laskey, *The Boston Tea Party*, c. 1902. Published in D. H. Montgomery, *The Beginner's American History*, Boston, 1902, 113. Photo: Special Collections, Monroe C. Gutman Library, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Commissioned by Watson and exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1778, *Watson and the Shark* was an immediate sensation.[22] It was a stunningly original composition: it lavished grand manner treatment on an event from recent history; it transformed the modest genre of the 'sea piece' by elevating it into history painting and focusing on figures rather than seascape, and it placed a black figure at the apex of the composition. It is now recognized both as one of the seminal works of modern history painting and one of the first articulations of what would become the romantic sublime in the visual arts.

The fundamental question animating the scholarship on *Watson and the Shark* is this: what would lead Copley to believe that a merchant's childhood swimming accident, a terrifying but historically inconsequential bit of floundering in a harbour, would have the necessary resonance to support a modern history painting of this scope and ambition? While existing essays have focused on the painting's religious resonances, its alignment with early American salvation narratives, its relationship to contemporary political prints, and its intersection with debates over the slave trade, I want to suggest that *Watson and the Shark*, while fully legible in each of these terms, also functions as a meditation on the breakdown of transatlantic material relations (particularly as that breakdown had recently manifested itself in the Boston Tea Party) and thus also on the breakdown of the model of plenary, synthetic perception that Copley had perfected in his portraits.[23]

Although *Watson and the Shark*, as an enormous history painting, may seem to have nothing to do with Copley's earlier, more modest tabletops, the tabletops form the basic compositional and thematic template from which the later painting both emerges and diverges. The *Watson* painting, like each of the tabletops, is defined by the intersection of vertical figures with an orthogonal plane that stretches forward to engage the perceptual space of the viewer. In *Watson*, this plane is defined by the surface of the water, in the portraits, by the watery reflective surfaces of the tables. As will be demonstrated below, such compositional similarities only emphasize the profound renunciation that the *Watson* painting offers to the tabletops' perceptual functions.

Despite its status as conspicuous, political spectacle and its pivotal role in triggering the American Revolution, images of the Boston Tea Party are surprisingly scarce. Most of the illustrations now used in history textbooks were produced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (*plate 9*). An early engraving of the incident was published in London in 1789 (*plate 10*), but it has not seized the contemporary cultural imagination, perhaps because it does not have the pedigree of immediate reportage that characterizes other prints of major prerevolutionary events like the Boston Massacre or the battles of Lexington and Concord. Indeed, *Watson and the Shark* is arguably the closest thing we have to a period visual imaginary of the Destruction of

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the Tea and the only image that struggles with the full range of the event's implications both for history and for painting. When the connections between *Watson and the Shark* and the Boston Tea Party are explored, Watson's misadventures in Havana come into compelling alignment with Copley's most acute and immediate concerns about the fragile status of the British Empire in America, about his own status as an artist, *and* about the very function and meaning of painting in the fracturing Atlantic World.

Copley and the Tea Party

Due to his family connections, Copley was intimately involved in the Tea Act crisis of 1773. During the 1760s and early 1770s, he had built a thriving practice in Boston, where he was the leading portrait painter to the city's elite. But his success through these uneasy years had depended on his ability to maintain a meticulous political neutrality, painting portraits from both ends of the Whig/Tory spectrum. However, the conditions produced by the Tea Act crisis put Copley in a position of extreme political vulnerability that would ultimately make such neutrality impossible. His family was at the centre of the difficulties. Four merchant firms in Boston had been consigned to receive and sell the notorious shipments of tea from the British East India Company, one of which was headed by Richard Clarke, Copley's father-in-law, and another by Copley's wife's cousins.[24] These consignees became the focus of patriot enmity during the crisis because they refused to bow to non-importation pressures and send the tea back to England. In the weeks leading up to the Destruction of the Tea, Copley's extended family was twice attacked by mobs and his father-in-law received death threats.[25]

As the crisis worsened, Copley (who was desperate to prevent the outbreak of violence) volunteered to serve as mediator between the growing crowds of patriots

10 ***Americans Throwing the Cargoes of the Tea Ships into the River, at Boston*****, in Reverend W. D. Cooper,** ***The History of North America…*****, London, 1789, plate opposite page 58. Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. Photo: Courtesy of the Library of Congress (LC-USZC4-538).**

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at Old South Meeting House demanding the return of the tea to England and the consignees who were holed up for protection in the British fortifications at Castle William on an island in Boston Harbour (see *plate 11*, where Boston appears at centre left, and Castle William is the comma-shaped island southeast of the city).[26] On the frigid night before the Destruction, he had rowed back and forth across Boston Harbour, carrying messages between the two parties in a desperate attempt to avoid the conflagration. Had he succeeded in his arbitration efforts, the course of world history may well have been drastically altered. But of course Copley failed to prevent the outbreak of violence, and the rupture in colonial relations occasioned by the Destruction of the Tea was one of the key factors in his decision to leave Boston in 1774.

The letters between Copley and his half-brother Henry Pelham about 'the fatal Era of the Tea's arrival' make clear not only that Copley perceived the Tea Party as the decisive event in the dissolution of colonial relations and as the direct cause of the Revolutionary War, but also that he recognized the monumental implications of his own failure to prevent it.[27] In his letters, Copley agonizes over his thankless attempts to stop the Destruction: 'You must think I aught to have many friends and thanks for the pains I took to prevent so violent and rash a peice of conduct. I was sure it would produce the consiquences that have followed and are only the faint beginings of More fatal and terrable evils than have yet taken place.'[28] 'Ocians of blood', he writes, 'will be shed.'[29]

Copley wrote these and similar letters at the same time that he was engaged in his most concentrated efforts to teach himself history painting. After leaving Boston, he had made a quick stop in London, where he saw Benjamin West's *Death of General Wolfe* (1770, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa), his key precedent, of course, for modern-dress history painting and the injection of profound historical allusions into contemporary events.[30] He then travelled to Italy, where he studied and copied Old Master paintings, spending a particularly concentrated few weeks examining Raphael's *Transfiguration* (see *plate 15*). His letters from Italy veer between two topics: his growing confidence as a painter of complex historical subjects, and his growing concerns about both the consequences of the Tea Party and the safety of his family and friends who remained barricaded back in Boston.

Given that Copley had found himself at the centre of what he knew to be an event of truly world-historical importance in the Tea Party, and given that his highest anxieties about the outcome of that event corresponded with his most furious preparations to be a history painter, it is worth wondering whether he might have considered the Tea Party itself as the overt subject of a modern history painting. Of course any such painting would have required a commission, which was not forthcoming. But there were other reasons, internal to the event and Copley's own involvement in it, that the Tea Party was both a compelling and an impossible subject for him. Two months after the Destruction of the Tea, Copley had already been struggling with the question of committing the event to public memory. He wrote to his father-in-law Richard Clarke about the possibility of producing a 'Memorial' of the event (by 'Memorial' he meant an official court statement laying out the facts of the event from the family's perspective): 'The matter of a Memorial had started in my mind more than three Weeks ago but I had many objections to it which I could not get over, the most meterial was this, that however Clear the facts may be yet they may be controverted, your conduct misrepresented, and what ever you either have or shall say misconstrued ...'[31] The letter shows that Copley worried about setting the record straight but also recognized that a straightforward recitation of the facts would not be an effective way of doing so. The topic was too controversial to be remembered

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11 Sir Thomas Hyde Page, *Boston, its environs and harbour, with the rebels works raised against that town in 1775, from the observations of Lieut. Page of His Majesty's Corps of Engineers, and from those of other gentlemen*, 1775 (?). Manuscript, pen-and-ink and watercolour, 45 × 64 cm. Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division. Photo: Courtesy of the Library of Congress (g3764b ct000070).

without 'misrepresentation', and Copley and his family were too close to the event for their testimony to appear disinterested – whatever they 'have or shall' express about the event would be inevitably 'misconstrued'.

Keeping in mind the simultaneous urgency and impossibility of representing the Destruction of the Tea, it becomes easier to understand why Copley would have embraced Brook Watson's commission so enthusiastically. In requesting a painting of his encounter with the shark, Watson commissioned an image depicting an American harbour in which something has gone overboard and is in imminent danger of obliteration. This gave Copley an opportunity to paint a scene onto which many elements of the Destruction of the Tea could be displaced, consciously or otherwise. Granted: it would be preposterous to set up a point-for-point correspondence between *Watson and the Shark* and the Tea Party. *Watson* is not a systematically coded allegory with this or that figure standing in neatly for the tea or for the merchants or for the patriots. But as we shall see the painting resonates so fully with the memory of the Tea Party that it would be equally preposterous to ignore these connections. Although the painting does not overtly represent the Destruction of the Tea, it would be difficult to imagine a commission more fully imbricated in the event and its aftermath. The setting, the cast of characters, the compositional management of forces in space, even the basic model of perception offered by the painting all intersect with the key political and artistic problems raised for Copley by the Destruction of the Tea.

Firstly, the cast of characters: as noted above, Copley was entangled in the Tea Crisis by virtue of his relation to the consignees set to receive the tea. Brook Watson was equally complicit, as the head of one of the export firms that had handled its shipment to Boston. In other words, the painting was commissioned by the tea's sender and painted by a close relation of the tea's receivers.[32] The tea chests hacked to bits in Boston Harbour were Watson's, as was the body threatened with watery dismemberment off Havana. Secondly, the setting. In both the Boston Tea Party and Watson's misadventure in Havana, something went wrongly overboard in an

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12 Robert Holmes, *Boston Tea Party*, 1991. Photograph. Boston: Boston Tea Party Ship and Museum. Photo: Robert Holmes/CORBIS.

American harbour. Of course, Havana is not Boston, but the two ports were both understood to be American harbours in the eighteenth century. As another corner of the triangular trade associated with British naval power, Havana was as much a part of 'America' as was Boston.[33] Moreover, the idea of all 'America' as a tropical zone, forged by earlier images of explorations in South America and the Caribbean, continued to inform imagery of the North Atlantic for many English and European audiences, furthering the imaginative interchangeability of Boston and Havana. Notice that the 1789 engraving of the Tea Party (see *plate* 10) includes palm trees and what looks like a volcanic outcrop in the background, neither of which, of course, were features of Boston Harbour.

Thirdly: the violence of the forces at play in Copley's shark attack also echo those applied to the tea in Boston Harbour. This connection is difficult to recover today, since existing visual renderings have tended to evacuate the Tea Party of its physical severity. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century illustrations show Sons of Liberty casually lifting tea chests overhead and tossing them overboard (see *plate* 9). More recent images – such as a photograph of a reenactment at the Boston Tea Party Museum (*plate* 12) – have continued this trend until the dematerialization of the event seems to have reached its limit. In these images, the Tea Party's value as pure political sign is repeatedly folded back onto the material imaginary of its actual occurrence. But in fact each lead-lined chest of tea weighed 450 pounds. The chests had to be hoisted on deck with block and tackle and then hatcheted open before being emptied over the side of the ships.[34] The damaged chests then landed in the shallow water of low tide, where patriots, splashing about in the salty tea blooming in the harbour, continued to hack away at them to ensure their final destruction.[35] The raising, straining, leaning, and violent dismemberment in the painting, in other words, were also features of the Destruction of the Tea.

Perception and Reception in *Watson* and the Tea Party

A more structural connection between *Watson and the Shark* and the Boston Tea Party, along with the compositional and iconographical slippages introduced above, lies

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in Copley's altered model of beholding, a revised conception of perceptual delivery that painting is (or is not) capable of achieving. *Watson and the Shark* is a post-tea-party painting inasmuch as it abandons Copley's previous model of sensory delivery by replicating at the level of pictorial structure the material destruction of tea in the harbour. If we were to imagine the Destruction of the Tea as it might appear through an empiricist lens, we would find a perceptual bundle coming from England but violently intercepted before it could be fully and properly incorporated into the colonial sensorium. As part of a spectacle of destruction, watched by thousands of people lining the waterfront, it would be a sensorily fragmentary sort of tea: tea that could be seen but not touched or tasted, tea that never reached its intended destiny as an agent of multisensory synthesis. It was tea taken by the harbour rather than by the bodies of colonists, and therefore it manifestly failed to produce plenary receptive impressions. In other respects as well, the Tea Party was understood as a sensorily misaligned or unnatural experience. Commentators noticed, for example, that the fires and moonlight created a ghastly kind of hyperillumination – 'Everything was as light as day, by means of lamps and torches; a pin might be seen lying on the wharf' – but that this acute visibility was accompanied by an eerie silence: 'Although there were many people on the wharf, entire silence prevailed, – no clamor, no talking.' There was 'a great silence of the neighborhood'.[36] Access to the event was granted to vision, but not to other senses.

The same kinds of failures characterize *Watson and the Shark*. Indeed, every operation of reflective impression, sensory synthesis, and focal attention that was standardized in the tabletop paintings is retracted in the painting. Where there were once unruffled tabletops that announced their capacity for retaining and regenerating precise impressions of reflection, there is now (occupying an equivalent portion of the canvas) a choppy and eerily unreflective sea that offers only, at best, displaced and distorted formal echoes.

13 Detail of John Singleton Copley, *Mr and Mrs Isaac Winslow (Jemima Debuke)*.

14 Detail of John Singleton Copley, *Watson and the Shark*.

As in many of the tabletop pictures, Copley populates this surface with grasping hands, but in this case, they all dramatically fail to reach their appointed objects. In the tabletop paintings, hands placidly align with their reflections coming up from below; here, the hands in the upper and 'bottum' parts of the painting miss each other entirely, creating an effect of sensory shear rather than equilibrium (*plate 13* and *plate 14*). Copley disrupts the neatly covalent lozenges made by reflection in the tables (see, for example, the balanced, perfect forms made by the tabletop as it meets Mrs Winthrop's hand (*plate 13*)), offering instead a series of offsetting triangles that echo, if anything, the jagged shapes of the shark's teeth. Connections between top and bottom, background and foreground, are also severed. *Boy with a Flying Squirrel* (see *plate 4*) had featured a delicate chain connecting foreground and background figures over an expanse of water (the glass); so with *Watson* a rope stretches between a figure in the boat and figure in the foreground sea. But now the rope lies slack, unhandled, the connection broken.

The viewer's role in the painting is sharply shifted along with these missed connections and misregistered

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reflections. Whereas the foreground of the tabletop paintings stages the dimensional enlivenment and embodiment of objects as they pass outward toward the picture plane, their recuperation from flat signs to multidimensional realities through the corporate synthesis of the viewer, the foreground of *Watson and the Shark* stages the opposite process: fragmentation, dismemberment, disincorporation. The ripping teeth of the giant shark and the flayed and dismembered leg of the figure of Watson are only the most obvious signs of this process. The figure of Watson, for example, is multiply resonant as a figure of aesthetic interruption and even disaster. As previous commentary on the painting has shown, Watson is a hybridized quotation from two

15 Raphael (Rafaello Sanzio), *The Transfiguration*, 1520. Oil on wood, 410 × 279 cm. Vatican State: Pinacoteca, Vatican Museums. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

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sources that Copley had studied intently while in Italy: the figure of the possessed boy in Raphael's *Transfiguration* and one of the sons in the *Laocoön* group.[37] But the full resonance of these allusions has not been traced.

The boy in the *Transfiguration* (*plate 15*) had been widely described by earlier eighteenth-century critics as a flaw in Raphael's composition because he broke the narrative unity of the scene and served to 'divide the Picture' by introducing an 'Under-Story'. As Jonathan Richardson wrote: 'O Divine Rafaelle, forgive me if I take the Liberty to say I cannot approve in this particular of that Amazing Picture of the Transfiguration, where the Incidental Action of the Man's bringing his Son possess'd with the Dumb Devil to the Disciples, and their not being able to cast him out is made at least as conspicuous, and as much a Principal Action as that of the Transfiguration.'[38] The possessed boy (already entangled with themes of diabolical or deviant 'possession' or seizure, as well as the action of casting out) is therefore associated with the shattering of narrative unity.

And speaking of shattering: the *Laocoön* allusion (*plate 16*) imports even more traumatic echoes of aesthetic breakage into the foreground. Having 'stood astonished' before the original in Italy, Copley purchased a plaster cast of the Laocoön group. It was one of a group of casts that he acquired in hopes of transporting the sculptural heritage of the classical world to his future studio in London. Writing to his wife from Florence in 1775, he promised that 'I shall find means to carry with me the most valuable specimens of art, in casts of plaster of Paris, of the finest works in the world.'[39] But this act of aesthetic transmission went horribly wrong: as one of Copley's earliest biographers wrote, 'It may here be mentioned that, when Copley received the case containing the above-named casts, they were found to be broken into a thousand pieces, from want of proper care in packing, – a disappointment which, in the words of his son, "he never ceased to regret during the whole course of his after-life."'[40] If, even after the splintered tea chests in Boston Harbour announced the violent miscarriage of transatlantic sensory communities, Copley had still clung to some hope that transit could suture long-distance separation, that hope must surely have been dashed into a thousand pieces along with his *Laocoön*.

With *Watson and the Shark*, the tabletops seem to have dropped out of Copley's portraits, revealing both the 'under parts' (which had been so assiduously obscured by the tables and disavowed by their clean reflections) and a profusion of incident which – with its diabolical 'under-story' – draws attention from the upper quarters of the painting. The crucial synthetic link between vision and touch has been severed – standing before *Watson and the Shark*, viewers are no longer beholders (be-holders); they have become spectators.

Copley not only forces this model of distanced and compromised reception upon the viewer; he also installs it within the world of the painting. Consider his unusual treatment of the figure of the black sailor in the rowboat. This figure befuddled critics, not only because his position at the top of the pyramidal composition radically inverted the normative hierarchies for such arrangements (with social subordinates occupying the subordinate corners of the pyramid), but also because of his cryptic expression and ambiguous role in the narrative action. Reviewers, who repeatedly praised the expressions of sympathy, 'eagerness' and general physical/emotional exertion of the other figures ('the Eagerness and the Concern so strongly marked in every Countenance', 'Horror bristling their Hairs, and the Eagerness of a compassionate good Heart for the poor Sufferer in their Faces') puzzled over the nondescript expression of the black figure and his failure to assist in the rescue efforts.[41]

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16 Roman copy, perhaps after Agesander, Athenodorus, and Polydorus of Rhodes, *The Laocoon Group*, 1st Century CE. Marble, 2.1 m (height) – present state, former restorations removed. Vatican State: Museo Pio Clementino, Vatican Museums. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

> But we must suppose, that at that instant of time, no horror in beholding the object would prevent seamen from acting to his rescue. It would not be unnatural to place a woman in the attitude of the *black*; but he, instead of being terrified, ought, in our opinion, to be busy. He has thrown a rope over to the boy. It is held, unsailorlike, between the second and third finger of his left hand and he makes no use of it.[42]

In these texts, the black figure exemplifies a numb impotence that is further reinforced by the critic's suggestion of emasculation. Crucially, the figure is described as seeing but not physically participating in the action surrounding him. 'He makes no use of' his hands.

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The black figure has rightly received a great deal of attention in previous treatments of the painting, most notably by Hugh Honour and Albert Boime, who draws the painting into a detailed history of the role that the politics of abolitionism played in British responses to the American Revolution during the 1770s and 1780s. For Boime, Copley's inclusion of this figure was a Tory propaganda tactic intended to show sympathy for the enslaved and thereby to highlight the slaveholding hypocrisy of the American 'Sons of Liberty'. He reads the weak agency of the black figure (who 'functions as little more than a peg on which to hang the towline') as evidence of Tory cynicism, since the figure serves merely a symbolic function in a revolutionary debate and is not actually to be granted liberty or agency in the real world. He is 'an invisible man whose capacity to act in the real world is blocked'.[43]

Yet the black figure also mirrors the viewer's own imagined position before the painting, standing in for the blocked, impotent, dis- or mis-embodiment that characterized transatlantic material relations during the Revolutionary crisis. The black figure was interpreted in terms of his inability to fully inhabit the moment, to act or to react according to the codes of synchronic sympathy; he simply *looks* at the action around him but seems unable or unwilling to participate bodily in the scene.[44] As is well known among Copley scholars, the pose and the position of the black sailor had originally been planned for a white figure (*plate 17*).[45] It was only later in the process of painting that Copley changed the ethnic identity of the figure; this indicates both the importance the figure held for Copley and also his difficulty in finding the proper embodiment for the role the figure played. In my view, Copley's decision here deploys racial discourse as a means of articulating the spectator's traumatic impotence by nominating a subaltern proxy to bear these functions in the painting.

17 John Singleton Copley, *Rescue Group*, 1777/78. Black chalk heightened with white on paper, 36 × 55.1 cm. Detroit: The Detroit Institute of Arts (City of Detroit Purchase). Photo: The Bridgeman Art Library.

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In his book *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm for a Metaphor for Existence*, Hans Blumenberg argues that the metaphor of the observer watching a shipwreck or other naval disaster from shore develops, during the nineteenth century, into the core metaphor for modern subjectivity, aesthetic distance, and the 'spectator position with regard to history'.[46] *Watson and the Shark* represents an earlier opening onto this position, and, moreover, defines it as integral to the art of painting. The breakup of the senses in shipwreck (from shore, one can see but not reach it) is not only coeval with what would become the fragmentation of the viewing subject in Romanticism, but (as Copley allows us to see) it is also an analogy for the limitations of painting as a synthetic, recuperative mode of communication, and for the failure of long-distance material-sensory communities. The shipwreck is to the dockside spectator what the painting is to the viewer – all and only image.

Copley's tabletop paintings had assiduously attempted to make painting a device for the plenary propagation of experience across the sea. Drawn as it is through the experience of the tea's destruction in Boston Harbour and the realization that the full reincorporation of objects over distance is impossible, *Watson and the Shark* recognizes the annulment of this dream. *All* paintings are shipwrecks, Copley seems to realize; like the English tea ships, they cannot deliver synthetic, multisensory, immediate impressions. The relationship between this sensory disjunction and academic painting will later become concretized in the flowering of Romanticism, but Copley's painting allows us to account for one of its origins in colonial traumas of transit. The unbridgeable gap between shipwreck and shore, a gap spanned only by vision, is analogous not only to that between the bodies of viewers and the information presented to them by painting, but also to that unbridgeable space between Anglo- and American-.

Notes

Special thanks go to Nicole Bass for her assistance with the illustrations for this essay.

1 See David Harvey, 'Time-space compression and the postmodern condition', in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Cambridge, MA, 1990, 284–307.

2 Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience*, Oxford, 2007 [1980], 7, 4.

3 The rare exceptions include Ann Gibson and Lucia Palmer, 'George Berkeley's visual language and the New England portrait tradition', *Centennial Review*, 31: 2, 1987, 122–45, and David Steinberg's writings on Charles Willson Peale, especially 'Acquisition, interrupted: Charles Willson Peale's *Stewart Children* and the labor of conscience', *Common-Place*, 4: 3, April 2004, http://www.common-place.org/vol-04/no-03/lessons/.

4 For more on the connections between empiricism and transatlantic thought, particularly in terms of Hume's work, see Emma Rothschild, 'David Hume and the Seagods of the Atlantic', in Susan Manning and Francis D. Cogliano, eds, *The Atlantic Enlightenment*, Burlington, VT, 2008, 81–96.

5 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford, 2000 [1739], Book 2, Part 3, Section 7, 274.

6 Hume, *Treatise*, 417.

7 See Jennifer L. Roberts, 'Copley's cargo: *Boy with a Squirrel* and the dilemma of transit', *American Art*, 21: 2, Summer 2007, 20–41.

8 John Greenwood, a painter, art importer, and founding member of the Society of Artists living in London, commissioned the portrait in honour of his mother's sixtieth birthday. See John Greenwood to Copley, 23 March 1770, in John Singleton Copley and Henry Pelham, *Letters and Papers of John Singleton Copley and Henry Pelham, 1739–1776*, Boston, MA, 1914 (hereafter *Copley-Pelham Letters*), 81–2.

9 Ann Gibson and Lucia Palmer (in an underappreciated 1987 article) have argued that Copley, as a Bostonian and a painter, could not possibly have avoided Berkeley's theories. Berkeley had travelled to New England in 1729 along with John Smibert, who then became a close friend and associate of the engraver Peter Pelham, Copley's stepfather, in Boston. Smibert's painting techniques were deeply impacted by Berkeley's ideas, and it was in Smibert's studio and library that Copley learned much of what he knew about painting. See Gibson and Palmer, 'George Berkeley's visual language', 122–45. On Berkeley's broader impact on British painting, see Amal Asfour and Paul Williamson, *Gainsborough's Vision*, Liverpool, 1999, 105–27. Michael Baxandall's reading of the shared 'brief' of the painter and the philosopher, and thus the shared 'awareness of the complexity and even the fragility of the act of perception' among Chardin, Locke, and Newton, has inspired the present reading: see *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, New Haven, 1985, 76.

10 George Berkeley, 'An essay towards a new theory of vision', in A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, eds, *Works of George Berkeley*, London, 1948–57, vol. 1, 202.

11 Prints, in Copley's own practice, were also 'reheated' into paintings. On Copley's use of British prints as infrastructures for his paintings, see Carrie Rebora Barratt, ed., *John Singleton Copley in America*, New York, 1995, passim.

12 Paul Staiti, 'Mrs John Winthrop', in Barratt, *Copley in America*, 316.

13 Hume, *Treatise*, 7.

14 Hume, *Treatise*, 11.

15 Hume, *Treatise*, 11.

16 'I will not contend with those that say a man may paint from his Ideas only, for I will admit it; I will admit that all men do; only I will observe that the memory of all men is not equilly retentive. One man shall see an object, and twelve months after shall have as perfect a

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knowledge of it as another that has seen the same object only a few Days; but yet the man who would see an object with an intention to paint it in a few Days still paints as much from Idea as the one who retains a remembrance of it a year. for all our Ideas of things is no more than a remembrance of what we have seen.' Copley to Pelham, 14 March 1775, in *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 302.

17 See Andrew Oliver, 'Peter Pelham, sometime printmaker of Boston', in *Boston Prints and Printmakers, 1670–1775*, Boston, MA, 1973, 159.

18 Reynolds, Discourse IV, in Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark, New Haven, 1997, 69. Roger De Piles, in his *Principles of Painting*, which Copley had read in English translation, similarly claimed that paintings should work 'to hinder the eye from being dissipated, and to fix it agreeably'. Roger de Piles, *The Principles of Painting*, London, 1743, 60.

19 See R. G. Bruce to Copley, London, 25 June 1767, *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 59.

20 Copley to Pelham, London, 17 August 1774, *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 249.

21 On the concentration of radical opposition around tea, see T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*, Oxford, 2004, especially ch. 8, 'Bonfires of tea', 294–331.

22 Watson commissioned the painting from Copley soon after the artist arrived in London in the mid-1770s. For basic information on the painting see Miles, 'Watson and the Shark', 54–71.

23 See Irma B. Jaffe, 'John Singleton Copley's 'Watson and the Shark', *American Art Journal*, 9: 1, May 1977, 15–25; Ellen Miles, entry for 'Watson and the Shark', in Miles, ed., *American Paintings of the Eighteenth Century*, Washington, DC, 1995, 54–71; Roger Stein, 'Copley's *Watson and the Shark* and aesthetics in the 1770s', in Calvin Israel, ed., *Discoveries and Considerations*, Albany, NY, 1976, 85–130; Ann Uhry Abrams, 'Politics, prints, and John Singleton Copley's *Watson and the Shark*', *Art Bulletin*, 61: 2, June 1979, 265–76; Albert Boime, 'Blacks in shark-infested waters: Visual encodings of racism in Copley and Homer', *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, 3: 1, Winter 1989, 19–47; and Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, Cambridge, MA, 1989, vol. 4, 37–41.

24 See Francis S. Drake, *Tea Leaves: Being a Collection of Letters and Documents Relating to the Shipment of Tea to the American Colonies in the Year 1773, by the East India Company*, Detroit, MI, 1970, xxiii; Benjamin Woods Labaree, *The Boston Tea Party*, Boston, MA, 1964, 25.

25 Labaree, *Boston Tea Party*, 110–14.

26 For Copley's attempts at arbitration in the days leading up to the Tea Party, see Copley to Jonathan and Isaac Winslow Clarke, 1 December 1773, in *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 211–13; Labaree, *Boston Tea Party*, 119–20, 123–4; Drake, *Tea Leaves*, 320–30; Abrams, 'Politics, prints', 267.

27 Henry Pelham to Copley, Boston, 10 October 1775, *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 362.

28 Copley to Pelham, Parma, 6 August 1775, *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 348.

29 Copley to Pelham, Parma, 6 August 1775, *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 348.

30 When Copley saw *The Death of Wolfe* for the first time, he was accompanied by his brother-in-law Jonathan Clarke, who had of course also been intimately involved in the tea crisis. See Miles, 'Watson and the Shark', 56.

31 Copley to Richard Clarke, 15 February 1774, *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 213–14.

32 See Miles, 'Watson and the Shark', 55; and for details on Watson (including his likely activities as a spy) see Abrams, 'Politics, prints', 268–9.

33 Geoff Quilley has reconstructed the significance of the Havana setting for *Watson and the Shark*, discussing the significance of Havana for the British at this time, and particularly its resonance as a symbol of the threats to British commerce in the West Indies that might follow from American independence. He, too, notes the inbuilt ambivalence of the setting, noting that Havana Harbour easily invited 'a recollection of Boston as the most notorious scene of American colonial merchant rebellion'. Quilley, 'Questions of loyalty: The representation of the British West Indian colonies during the American Revolutionary War', in John Bonehill and Geoff Quilley, eds, *Conflicting Visions: War and Visual Culture in Britain and France c. 1700–1830*, Burlington, VT, 2005, 117–28.

34 See Labaree, *Boston Tea Party*, 8; and Drake, *Tea Leaves*, lxiii, lxxix. The angles assumed by the harpoonist and black figure in *Watson and the Shark* might be said to resemble the geometry of the block and tackle system, in which a compound pulley was used, akin to the wound rope in the hand of the black sailor.

35 Labaree, *Boston Tea Party*, 144; Drake, *Tea Leaves*, lxxxi.

36 Drake, *Tea Leaves*, lxxix, lxxx, lxxxviii.

37 See Stein, 'Copley's *Watson and the Shark*', 103.

38 Jonathan Richardson, *Essay on the Theory of Painting*, London, 1725, 57.

39 John Singleton Copley to Susannah Copley, Florence, 9 June 1775, in Martha Babcock Amory, *The Domestic and Artistic Life of John Singleton Copley, R.A.*, Boston, MA, 1882, 53.

40 Amory, *Copley*, 54.

41 *The Public Advertiser*, 28 April 1778; and *The St. James's Chronicle; or, British Evening-Post*, 25–28 April 1778.

42 *The General Advertiser, and Morning Intelligencer*, 27 April 1778.

43 Boime, 'Blacks in shark-infested waters', 35, 36.

44 On the temporality of sympathy in British history painting at this time see David Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England*, New Haven, 1993.

45 See Miles, 'Watson and the Shark', 62

46 Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm for a Metaphor for Existence*, trans. Steven Rendell, Cambridge, 1997, 47.

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